

## **Harrington and his Stupid Kids by DeathByShyKid**

**Category:** Stranger Things, 2016

**Genre:** Family, Humor

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Steve H.

**Status:** In-Progress

**Published:** 2017-12-15 18:35:11

**Updated:** 2017-12-23 08:17:11

**Packaged:** 2019-12-17 03:14:21

**Rating:** T

**Chapters:** 5

**Words:** 5,982

**Publisher:** [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

**Summary:** A collection of one-shots involving Steve and his wonderful (yet completely psychotic) kids that he would do anything for. I will accept ideas as to what you'd like to see from Harrington and his Stupid Kids. Includes the following characters: Steve, Dustin, Lucas, Mike and his older sister Nancy, Lucas, Will, his older brother, Jonathan, and his mom, Joyce, with Hopper and Eleven.

## 1. His Responsibility

Everyone knew that when the entire group – parents, teenagers, and kids alive – were out and about, the kids were *mostly* Steve's responsibility. Those energetic little shits listened to Steve more often than to someone like Nancy or Jonathan, a feat in and of itself since it seemed those two were more responsible than someone like Steve. They'd obviously never seen his overprotective side, almost definitely directed at the rambunctious kids that just adored him all the same.

Hopper can remember one incident that is most prominent in his mind.

It was about seven months after the gate had been closed and things had evened out, well, *mostly*. Joyce and Nancy had wanted to go shopping for a little while, just to have a little fun with some extra money that had acquired as of lately. They thought that it would be nice to bring the kids along. However, they knew just how much those six could get into trouble just by breathing. Steve instantly came to mind, his babysitter skills starting to get better and better as he spent more time with those 'dipshits', as he likes to call them.

Of course, Joyce invited Hopper to join them and almost practically dragging Jonathan into the shopping trip for Nancy's sake, the two have started to official date in the last few months. So, the time and date were made.

The kids, within an hour or two of walking around the halls of the shopping mall, got pretty bored and had started to complain. Hopper can still hear their whining voices in his head when he thinks about this day:

"Ugh, there is nothing to do."

"I'm *bored*!"

"I can't believe they won't even let me *skateboard* in here."

"This is shut bullshit."

"Are we going to do anything *fun*?"

"I'm so *bored*!"

"Isn't there *anything* that we can do in here?"

"Can we please *leave*?"

"This is *boring*."

Hopper is pretty sure that the word 'bored' and 'boring' became his least favorite word afterward. Those six couldn't stop complaining about the lack of things to do. Sure, there was a comic book store for them to browse around in but the boys adamantly exclaimed they'd already read most of them. Eleven liked the pictures in the comic books but didn't understand a lot of the words in them, often asking what certain words meant. Max wasn't really a 'comic book' kind of girl, enjoying certain types of novels and that was about it for her reading extravaganza.

So, it was no wonder that the little heathens start to talk about ditching the mall to go to the arcade or maybe the new diner in town.

"I have some quarters on me right now. I think it'd be enough to play at *least* six games of Dig Dug." Max started, pointing at the change in her palms.

"Oh, I have a bunch at my house!" Lucas pointed out, "We could stop there and grab them."

Dustin nodded enthusiastically, "And after, we could get burgers and shakes."

Will beamed at the thought of shakes, looking awestruck for a second or two, "I want a strawberry shake!"

Mike turned to Eleven, "What do you think about it, El?"

She smiled at him, bobbing her head slowly, "Yes."

The not-so-unofficial leader of their party nodded his head, "Then it's

settled, we go to the arcade and then the diner."

"Wait!" Dustin suddenly called out, "What about Hopper and Joyce?"

"What about them?" The redhead raised an eyebrow, crossing her arms over her chest.

"I doubt that they will just let us walk out of here." He said back.

"Why don't we just ask?" Will piped up, already looking like he was heading towards the adults' direction, "They could drop us off there and come back to shop."

The six of them stopped for a second before running up behind the two adults. "Hopper! Hopper!" Some of them called out. "Mrs. Byers! Mrs. Byers!" Others spoke out. The adults blinked and turned around.

"What are you kids up to this time?" Hopper grumbled looking at a gray shirt with bold, red lettering that read 'Dad's Gun Show'. There were white arrows pointing towards the armholes of the shirt. He snorted at the thought, Eleven instantly coming to mind.

"Can we go to the arcade?!" Dustin shouted out excitedly, "We've got change and stuff so you wouldn't have to pay for it!"

"Yeah! Yeah! And maybe we can go to that new diner afterward?" Max pleaded with her wide eyes, looking like she had never done something wrong in her entire life.

Hopper and Joyce exchanged a look, the former looking a little reserved while the latter was amused. Joyce smiled, staring at the six children, "I don't mind. Hop?" She turned to him now, searching for his answer.

He shuffled through a few more shirts, keeping silent for a few seconds. Hopper knew almost immediately that begging puppy-dog eyes stared intently at him. The sheriff sighed, "I'm don't know, go ask Steve."

A light bulb nearly went off in their heads. They stared at each other with pure child's joy bouncing in between each other. The six of them turned and ran off to where the three teenagers were talking amongst

themselves near some belts in the corner of the store. "Steve! Steve!" They shouted out excitedly, getting dirty looks from other customers and employees.

"Hey, didn't anyone teach you to use your inside voices when out in public?" Steve lectured once the kids got closer, hand on his hip.

"Sorry." They mumbled out almost simultaneously. Jonathan and Nancy chuckled behind the self-appointed-babysitter. They never could figure out where this parental energy came from in Steve; they didn't think he had it in him to take care of six heathens while keeping them in line.

He rolled his eyes, "Now, what do you shitheads want?"

"We're bored." Eleven quietly said, pointing towards the exit, "Fun."

"Can you *please* take us to the arcade?" Max grinned up at the older boy.

"Did you ask Mrs. Byers or Hopper?" Steve raised a critical eyebrow, looking more and more like a stern parent as time passed. Jonathan and Nancy were having a hard time keeping their smiles and chuckles at bay.

Lucas bobbed his head quickly, pointing at their babysitter, "Yeah, but Hopper told us to ask you."

The teenagers stopped, looking in between each other, thoroughly shocked at the statement. Steve searched their faces, Nancy giving him a shrug of 'I-have-no-idea-what-to-say' and Jonathan just looking completely frozen.

"Well?" Mike impatiently said, giving that know-it-all-Wheeler-look Steve had become acquainted with on quite a few occasions.

The brunette thought for a second before sighing, looking defeated, "Yeah, sure."

"Yes!" The kids cheered.

"Can we get burgers and shakes too, at that new diner?" Will

questioned with wide awestruck eyes.

Steve had always found it hard to turn Will down, "Yeah, I guess so." He pulled out his keys and twirled them for a second. The six kids got to message, cheering and giggling amongst themselves while starting to head for the exit in record time. The brunette waved at Jonathan and Nancy, "See you later."

"Have fun!" She grinned back.

He headed for Joyce and Hopper next. "What time do you want the shitheads back?" Steve raised an eyebrow in question.

"Six is fine." The older woman smiled warmly, "Make sure that they don't spend all their money too."

"I'll try but they do tend to get away from me at the arcade with all their running about." He chuckled, turning to Hopper, "Is six okay for you?"

Hopper nodded, smirking slightly, "Yeah, but remember, they're *you're* responsibility. At least for now."

Steve smiled, "I'll make sure that they won't do anything stupid." With that, he headed for the parking lot where six excited children waited impatiently for him by his car.

## 2. Ice Cream and Permission

"There, happy?" Steve grumbled lowly, handing over some cash for the ice creams he'd just bought the kids. The six of them simultaneously bobbed their heads, licking off their popsicles and fudge pops and ice cream cones.

"Thanks for the ice cream." Will smiled brightly.

This got a course of "Thank you, Steve!" from the other kids as they went back to their frozen treats.

He chuckled at them, running a hand through his famous hair, "Yeah, yeah, just stop asking on such short notice or I wouldn't have to buy you all three-dollar ice creams every time."

"Sorry, but El wanted to do something today and ice cream was all that we came up with," Mike stated, mouth already covered in chocolate.

"God, you kids are so fucking messy," Steve mumbled to himself, grabbing napkins off the counter behind him and throwing them to the kids. The baby Wheeler grabbed one graciously, wiping his chin thoroughly. The self-appointed-babysitter sat down in the free seat beside Lucas, "So, ice cream was the only thing you came up with? Not even that Danger Dungeon thing you kids play?"

"For the last time, Steve, it's Dungeons and *Dragons*, not Danger Dungeon," Dustin exclaimed, waving a dirtied hand around.

Steve placed a napkin in his open hand, getting a look from the younger kid, "Yeah, that's what I meant."

"Well, El doesn't know how to play Dungeons and Dragons yet," Lucas stated like it was the most obvious thing ever.

"Plus," Max popped in, licking her fingers, getting that 'stop-doing-that' look from Steve, "Eleven was the one who wanted to do something so." She waved her hands for emphasis.

"So, you let her choose," Steve stated, rolling his eyes at the lengthy

explanation.

"Yes," Eleven stated, slowly licking her ice cream.

He nodded at that, taking a sip of the soda that he'd gotten earlier, having not wanted ice cream at that moment, "So, what do you kids want to do afterward? Arcade? Some nerdy shit? Or am I taking you shitheads home?"

The group thought for a second before Eleven shook her head, "No."

Having been used to the 'yes' and 'no' responses from the badass little psychic, Steve raised an eyebrow, "You don't want to go home yet?"

She nodded, "Alone."

"Yeah, alright." He smiled slightly, "So, what's the plan now?"

Dustin sighed and crossed his arms, having just finished his ice cream, "I don't think most of us could go to the arcade. We all went last weekend and spent most of our change. It'd be pointless to go today."

"I agree with Dustin," Mike said, thinking intently.

"We could go ride our bikes around the neighborhood," Max suggested half-heartedly, not really liking the idea but having nothing else to give the group. Everyone shrugged, not really interested in the idea.

"Eggos?" Eleven looked at Steve, pointing in the direction of the supermarket.

"Sorry, but I only have enough money for gas, can't spend any more." Steve gave her an apologetic smile.

She nodded, slightly understanding, "Okay."

Lucas threw his trash away, coming back and slumping against the table, "Well, we could go back to Mike's place and play board games."

"I don't think Eleven would understand most of them." Mike said,



"And half of them are four player games or they're too hard to explain."

Steve sighed at the indecisiveness, "Isn't there anything at all you little shits could do?"

"Can we play by the lake, like skip rocks or something?" Will suggested quietly.

"That actually doesn't sound that bad." Lucas thought for a second on it.

"We could teach El how to throw rocks across the water." Mike piped in.

"Throw rocks?" Eleven whispered to herself mostly, getting a nod from the boy beside her.

"Yeah!" Dustin cheered.

"Yeah, no." Their self-appointed-babysitter shook his head, butting in on their exciting forms.

"What, *why*?" Max gave him a dirty look.

"If one of you diphits fall in then it's *my* fault." He crossed his arms, "Plus, I bet the water is too cold for any of you to be playing in-"

Dustin huffed, "We're not going to *play* in the *water*."

"Don't care." Steve stated, "Find something else to do or-"

"HARRINGTON!"

The teenager froze, turning his head quickly, seeing a livid sheriff walking towards him. He blinked in surprise, mind going over everything he'd ever done that would remotely cause for Hopper to be mad with him since the last he'd seen of the man. He couldn't think of anything. Steve stood up from the table, "Hopper? What's wrong?"

The older man stared into Eleven's eyes, "You took Jane out without

*permission?"*

"What?" The brunette gave him an incredulous look.

"You heard me, Harrington." Hopper's voice was stern.

"Yeah, but I didn't take her out without permission," Steve said back, looking at the girl quickly who looked suspicious.

He rubbed his temples, "And why is it that she's here without my knowledge?"

"I have no idea." The teenager shrugged, pointing to her, "Eleven said that you dropped her off at Mike's to hang out for a few hours. Dustin called and said that the party wanted some ice cream so I picked them up and here we are now."

Hopper froze for a second before heaving a long sigh, "Sorry for the accusation."

"What?"

"It seems that Jane here left the house without me knowing and walked to Mike's, saying that I dropped her off." His eyebrows furrowed together, "Isn't that right, Jane?"

She didn't look at him, "I wanted to see my friends."

Steve turned his head to look at her, "Why didn't you ask?"

"He was going to say no," Eleven said, looking up at him with her wide dark eyes.

"You don't know that." He raised an eyebrow, "He might have said yes and drove you all the way over to Mike's house. He might have said no but allowed the kids to come to the cabin."

"Or he might have made me stay home, alone." She crossed her arms.

"Yeah, but since you didn't ask, you'll never know." Steve suggested, turning to look at Hopper, whispering lowly, "You should let her have more freedom. Wouldn't want her to feel trapped, right?"

Hopper sighed, rubbing his forehead, "I'll pick you up at seven at Mike's tonight, alright?"

"Nine?" Eleven raised a questioning eyebrow.

"No."

"Eight-three-zero?"

"Eight-fifteen." Hopper rolled his eyes.

"Eight-one-five." She whispered to herself.

He sighed, turning back to the self-appointed-babysitter, "Keep them in line and if I'm at Mike's place and Jane's not there, you're dead, Harrington."

Steve chuckled, raising his hands in the air, "Yeah, got it." The sheriff nodded before walking towards his truck and driving off. Once he was out ear-shot, the brunette turned towards the kids, "Eleven, you've got to get better at asking for permission. I thought Hopper was going to strangle me."

"Thank you." She smiled.

Steve smiled slightly, "Yeah, yeah. I'm glad that you're having fun. So, has anyone figured out what they want to do?"

There was a collective groan of boredom.

### 3. I'm Still So Afraid

It was nearing midnight, the wind whistled rhythmically outside as the trees danced in the breeze. Steve stared at the natural beauty of his backyard out his kitchen window, the moonlight giving it a gleam he hadn't really noticed in his spare time. He gave it a small smile, throwing the sponge he'd been using to clean dirty plates and cups in the sink. He shook his wet hands before wrapping them in a towel. As he walked towards the couch for some late-night TV before he decided to go to bed, Steve thought of the kids that were paired up in beds in the two guests' bedrooms upstairs.

Joyce had come to him Wednesday morning while the kids were at school and asked him if he'd watch Will Thursday afternoon, Friday, and possibly Saturday. Apparently, Jonathan had his eyes on some out-of-state college that he wanted to go to and his mom was going to go with him to a tour of the college. Of course, he said yes since he liked to hang out with the kid. They agreed on the time and Steve promised to drive Will to school in the morning and pick him up in the afternoon.

Similarly, Nancy talks with Steve on their way to lunch about how her parents were leaving for a two-day trip for their anniversary in a week. She grumbled about having to watch her brother while their parents were gone; she had plans with her friends' afterschool for the next few days. Steve graciously said to let Mike come over to his house, having to already watch Will for a few days. Nancy thanked him and went home to tell her brother about his change of plans Thursday afternoon and get permission from her parents about it.

So, it's no surprise that when he pulled up to the middle school to grab Will and Mike that Dustin and Lucas were waiting for him with a bag of clothes and other essentials. Steve had given them a look, "Do you parents know about this?" In turn, the uninvited boys gave him hand-written notes with signatures from their moms saying that they were okay with it if Steve was. "God, they could have just called." He remembered mumbling out before allowing the rascals in and driving to his house.

Over the months after the incident with the gate and Demadogs, the

parents had come to know him as Steve the Babysitter who could be called up on short notice and still be able to deal with their kids for them. Plus, the kids found that they enjoyed Steve watching over them instead of other babysitters or older siblings in Mike and Will's cases. Steve didn't mind, having always enjoyed hanging out with the kids daily while also trying to figure out what to do with his life.

The stairs behind him creaked. Had he not known that there were slumbering children upstairs, he might have jumped four feet in the air. After all, there is always a possibility that Apocalypse part three might happen anytime. Steve turned around, seeing Will standing there, shaking in the cool air of the night. He cocked his head, leaning off the couch, "Hey, what're you doing up?"

"I... I just..." The Byers boy looked down at his pale feet, grabbing at his shirt anxiously, "Um... C-Can I um... can I sit by y-you?" The words were so soft that he was surprised he could even hear Will.

"Yeah, come here." He scooted over, giving Will room on the couch. The pale boy made his way over to the seat, eyes lingering in the dark hallways and corners of the room. Steve didn't miss the look.

Will rubbed his eyes before bringing his knees up to his chest, sniffing quietly, "You're still up?"

Steve nodded, "I'm not tired right now."

"Don't you have school tomorrow?" The brunette turned towards the older boy, dark eyes unblinking.

"Yeah." He shrugged, leaving it at that before meeting the kid's gaze, "Question is, what are *you* doing up? It's almost midnight."

Will bit his lip, leaning his head on his babysitter's shoulder, curling into the other's warmth, "I had a nightmare."

Steve wrapped a secure arm around the boy's shoulder, making sure that it wasn't too tight of a grasp and not too loose, "Do you want to talk about it?"

"Not really." He whispered out, scooting into the hug, sniffing again, "Maybe."

"Hey, if you don't want to, then it's okay? We can talk about something else if you want." He assured, giving the kid a small smile.

"It's not that I *don't* want to talk about it, it's just that... I'm afraid you'll m-make fun of me." Will admitted.

The teenager sighed, squeezing the kid slightly, "I wouldn't make fun of you for anything. You went through a lot, kid. You're allowed to have nightmares and be scared. I would be surprised if you *didn't* have any nightmares." Will nodded slowly, smiling slightly.

They sat in silence for several seconds. It was sometimes interrupted by their soft breaths or a small snuffle from the younger of the two. Steve didn't try to demand the information, having dealt with nightmares from the other boys while babysitting in the past. Usually, it was Dustin who came to him after every nightmare the kid had while under Steve's watch. Lucas was the one who didn't have a lot of bad dreams throughout the night, deciding to just deal with it by himself but told Steve about them the next morning. He'd never really liked to keep them to himself. Mike was the one who just started to come around to asking for Steve to stay with him until he fell back to sleep.

And Will?

There were nights where he would wake up and just *scream*, scream for several minutes like he was being murdered. Steve had always been late to the party, arriving to assess the information only to have Mike or Dustin or Lucas to just make him go away as they dealt with Will's nightmare. He'd leave them to it, making sure to check on them in an hour or so, just to make sure. This was the first time Will's gone to *him* and not his friends to help him through a nightmare.

"It was *everything*." Will suddenly whispered out, making the other lose his train of thought.

"Everything?" Steve raised an eyebrow.

"Yeah." He mumbled out, curling into his babysitter's side more, "Steve... I got everyone killed. We were all stupid to think that I wasn't... *possessed* anymore and it just..." He squeezed his eyes shut,

hands clinging to the teenager's shirt. "The shadow monster came back for us and he just... he killed *everyone*." A sob left him, "Everyone was *gone* a-and I was the only one I-left. He just kept laughing and *laughing* at me because I was stupid and afraid. I'm still so *afraid*."

Steve listened with a pained heart, pulling Will closer to him, "You're not stupid, Will."

"Y-Yes I am." He sobbed out, watery dark eyes glaring at him.

"If anyone is *stupid*, it's that shadow monster. He'd be stupid to come back for us." He gave the kid a smile, "If he comes back, we'll just throw him right back where he came from and save Hawkins like we did last time."

Will rubbed his eyes, "Really?"

"Yeah, of course." Steve hugged the Byers' boy closer to him, "I made a promise to myself that I'd do my best to keep you little shitheads safe. I would say that I've done a pretty good job at it so far."

That got a chuckle out of the wrecked kid, "Thanks, Steve, for everything."

He ruffled Will's hair, "Always. You can come to me for anything. Now, you better head off to bed before you're too tired tomorrow to even get up."

"Same could be said for you, Steve." Will smiled, getting up from the couch and heading for the stairs, "Good-night."

"Night, kid." He grinned, "*I promised I'd protect you, always.*"

## 4. Home is Where the Kids Are

Steve sits in the dark, awake at four o'clock in the morning just staring at the wall opposite of his kitchen sink. He leans against the counter, thinking to himself. It is silent and so *cold* inside his house. He'd already had the thought to turn up the heat but, for some reason, had no desire to turn it up. Maybe it was because no matter what temperature it was inside the house, it always *felt* cold to Steve.

He'd been the only resident in his house for the last year and a half, his parents never home for less than a week or two before flying off to work in another city. They'd always had their eyes on something bigger in the world, not this wholesome and small life in Hawkins. Even if that meant leaving their only son in a quiet house until he was old enough to do what he wanted with his life.

Steve sighs, pushing off the counter he'd been leaning on and walked over to the coffee pot. As Hopper always says, mornings are for coffee and contemplation. Plus, if he can't sleep then he might as well think until the early mornings pull one of the kids to his front doorstep for yet another adventure that involves his money, car, or bat of nails, maybe even his company, you never know with those kids. He smiled at the thought of them, watching the dark black coffee drip into the pot. The smell started to slowly waft into the room, a sense of warmth seeping into his cold walls and empty house. His home had always been a place of loneliness and discontent. That's why Steve liked to host parties every now and then or to turn on every light and heat up the room, just to bring some form of life to his bleak home. His barren and *dead* house.

The teenager pulled a cup from a cabinet and went about making his coffee just the way he liked it, strong and sweet, *really* sweet. It made him feel alive and that there wasn't a thing of death outside his kitchen window. The outside of his house has haunted him since the last time Barb was seen alive. Did she ever leave Steve's house? Was she on her way home when she was attacked by the Demogorgon? Did she ever make it to the door or was she killed outside, by his pool that glowed in the early morning of light? Did Barb die just outside his window?



Steve won't ever *truly* know when or where Barb died but that doesn't mean that his mind doesn't conjure up death and despair when he's alone... which wasn't a lot nowadays, with a rowdy bunch of kids kicking down his door nonstop.

He sat down on the couch, careful as to not spill his coffee. The brunette took a small sip, scrunching up his nose slightly. In all honesty, Steve had never really liked coffee; it was always too... *bleh* for his likes. However, with everything that had happened, sometimes his body just doesn't like to sleep. Steve had slowly become an insomniac and coffee was just something to pass the time before daylight started to come through the windows and 'officially' start his day.

As he stared at the blank wall above his fireplace, he thought some more. Steve hadn't thought about his home's lack of life in about a year or so after Will had been found and the Demogorgon had been killed. He'd gone home to an empty house and just silently cried because he wanted some type of reassurance that he wasn't insane. Instead, he got creepy hallways and dark corners, not to mention the unstoppable *coldness* that seeped into his tired bones. It was all Steve could think about for days until he just no longer cared, he had other things to do.

Steve thought long and hard about what he would do once he turned eighteen and graduated. What would he do with his home once he got older? He thought about selling his parents' home – he no longer wanted anything to do with it – and moving closer to the city to be closer to the kids in case anything happened again. He thought about working with Hopper as a deputy but he'd have to sacrifice nearly half a year to just be trained. In six months, things could change, things could happen... bad things. Did he really want to be away that long? Steve couldn't tell.

All in all, Steve hated his home. He hated it so much, hated its darkness and cold atmosphere. He hated how the light was some much dimmer at night and that every step you took made a creak. He hated how empty and *dead* it was inside. He hated it so much, hated everything about it.

However, it wasn't until recently that he started to hate his home less

and love the kids more.

Mike had started to want more time to play one of their Dungeons and Dragons campaign instead of having one or two of their party members go home in the middle of one. The kids hated it as much as Steve hated to hear all the complaining the next afternoon when he picked them up from school. So, Dustin – one of the brilliant minds behind all their crazy plans – came up with the idea of just going over to Steve's house for a Dungeons and Dragons campaign. All of their parents *loved* Steve since they knew that their kids would be safe with him, especially Joyce, so it would be perfect. They would be able to stay longer – maybe even have an unplanned sleepover if the campaign extended past the time they were supposed to be home – and no one would have to leave.

It would be perfect, not just for the kids but for Steve too.

The party members had thought that Steve would immediately turn down the idea and was thoroughly surprised when their self-appointed-babysitter instantly agreed to the idea. He was perfectly fine at any time the kids wanted to stay over, hell, even spend the night. The kids remember that Steve was smiling before giving all the rules of the house, just to make sure. So, all the little heathens went home to tell their parents about the change of plans the following weekend and Steve stayed, contented.

Since, in all honesty, Steve didn't mind the kids coming over, not one bit because that meant that his house wasn't as lonely as it was before.

## 5. Your Mom Adores Me

Steve stared with a slowly accelerating heart rate at the house before him. No matter how many times he'd been here or Max reassuring him that Billy wouldn't do anything now, he was never too sure. He'd been told to never go up to the doorstep or else Billy might be provoked and to always stay in his car with the ignition on. Beep the horn twice and Max would be in the passenger's seat in three. That's what he's done for the last six months, no matter how nerve-wracking it was at times.

One. Two.

The loud horn of his car startled the peace and quiet of the neighborhood. Sometimes it made Steve anxious as if the other neighbors were as vicious and bloodthirsty as Billy *fucking* Hargrove. However, no incidents had come up so he continued to blare his horn twice for Max to hurry up. The door opened but it wasn't the redhead that Steve was expecting.

Susan Hargrove.

Steve blinked and straightened in his seat, eyes discreetly watching as the older woman shimmied almost silently over to the car. His heart pounded; he'd never officially met the woman and was kind of startled, if he was going to be honest with himself. He rolled down the window when Susan was closer and kind of peeked out. She smiled down at him with some weird warmth that he neither saw in Max nor Billy. He blinked in surprise.

"Good morning." She quietly spoke, voice so uncanny to the gruffness he'd seen in Max.

"Ah, good morning, Mrs. Hargrove." Steve tried to give her a small smile but was suddenly very anxious.

The redhead chuckled, "Please, it's Susan."

The atmosphere instantly became brighter and Steve graciously smiled, "What can I do for you today?"

"I just wanted to let you know that you are a very kind and generous young man." Susan smiled softly, the warmth of motherhood just shining from her.

Steve blinked in surprise, "Me?"

"Oh, of course." She waved a hand towards him, "Max talks about you all the time. She looks up to you and loves you like a brother. Even if things between Max and Billy haven't always been the easiest, I'm glad she has someone like you in her life."

The brunette lets a small smile crawl on to his lips, eyes peeking at the house, barely getting a glimpse of Max messing around in the living room, "That's really kind of you to say. I'd protect her with my life if anything were to happen."

Susan beamed brightly, "I'm glad. Can you have her home by six tonight? Neil gets weird about Max hanging out with a bunch of boys so late at night."

Steve nodded, "I understand. If we're going to be late, I'll call you beforehand so that you're not worrying."

"Ah, you are too kind." The redhead grinned once more, the world a little brighter, "Makes sure she doesn't get into too much trouble."

"Of course." He let a small chuckle out.

The front door opened, Max running up to the car with unrealistic childish energy. She looked in between her mom and self-appointed-babysitter, "Uh... What's going on? Mom? Steve?"

"Have fun, sweetheart." Susan kissed the top of her daughter's head, getting an annoyed look before waving to Steve and heading back to the house.

Max watched her go before climbing into the passenger's seat and glaring at Steve, "What was *that*?"

"What do you mean?" Steve raised an eyebrow, starting the ignition.

"My *mom* was *smiling*, like a true *fucking* smile!" The redhead raised

her voice for emphasis.

"Language." He chastised, glancing at her quickly, "And what do you mean by that? So, what if your mom smiles; everyone smiles."

"Steve, you don't understand." She exasperated.

The brunette rolled his eyes, turning left, heading for Lucas' place to pick him up next, "Then help me understand."

Max crossed her arms, "My mom hasn't smiled like *that* in almost four years!"

Steve chuckled, grinning towards the road, "Well, I guess your mom just adores me."

"*What?*"

He laughed at her annoyed voice, "Apparently, *you* talk about me all the time at home."

The redhead's cheeks started to turn pink, "I... I do not!"

"That's not what Susan was saying. She was also talking about how you look up to me-"

"Steve, shut up!"

"-and that you love me like-"

"SHUT UP!" Max shouted out, punching his shoulder, red-faced.

"-a brother." Steve turned to Max, the car stopped at a red light, "Your mom is also apparently glad that you have someone like *me* in your life."

Max turned to the window, quiet for a second, "Well... I'm... glad that you're in my life, too."

He grinned, "I know."

"Now, can we *please* change the subject?" She grumbled out.

Steve rolled his eyes, turning on the radio, "Your mom still adores me."

"STEVE!"